



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

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Help. Hope. Answers. Today

Reflections from AAoM's CEO During COVID-19

Social distancing and isolation: these are not new concepts to those who live with, service, or advocate for individuals with autism. In fact, social deficits are one of three core defining features of autism spectrum disorder, which also includes communication and behavior challenges.

What COVID-19 has taught me about social isolation is that our need to be meaningfully connected to others is critical to quality of life and our mental health functioning on a very primitive level. Mandates to stay home, maintain a 6-foot distance from others, and minimize physical contact/touch have been new challenges to most, but I can't help drawing parallels to our population of people with autism and the experiences they encounter every day.

We have frequently heard family members describe a loved one as "being trapped in his own world" or "feeling she wants to connect with me, but can't". Sound familiar? I think all of us have been feeling "trapped" and restricted from communication and interaction beyond our control. Can you imagine a life of social "distancing" for so many...wanting to be connected and engaged with others, but unable to do so? Of course, I am not claiming what we are experiencing in this new COVID-19 world is the same as living with autism, but it certainly has given me greater perspective on what some of those challenges must be like, and to live with someone for whom that deep human connection isn't always felt in the traditional way.

April is Autism Awareness Month. As we tick off the days of social distancing, I hope all of us will step back to appreciate that what we are experiencing is time limited – not a lifelong condition of "disconnection" from others. Let's not forget our obligation, on the other side of COVID-19, to do what we can to better understand, include, and provide opportunities for people with autism in our community, social circles, peer groups, workplaces, schools, and the many other places we all have come to appreciate so much more now that they've been taken away.

Sincerely,

Colleen Allen, Ph.D.
President & CEO, Autism Alliance of Michigan





Simple Suggestions for Preventing and Managing Problem Behavior

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The COVID-19 pandemic has likely resulted in significant changes to your family's daily routine. These unpredictable changes can be very stressful for individuals with autism and may have an impact on problematic, dangerous, or inappropriate behavior. Here are some simple suggestions for preventing and managing your child's problematic behavior during this challenging time:

- ① Make time to care for yourself, even if it's just 10 minutes of quiet in the bathroom. You cannot care well for others if you don't take care of yourself.
- ② Try to establish and maintain a predictable daily routine as much as possible. This may involve a visual schedule or calendar, or simply taking a few minutes each morning to review the plan for the day with your child.
- ③ As much as you can within the current public health restrictions, allow your child to have access to their preferred activities.
- ④ When giving your child instructions, make sure they are simple and direct; and then provide praise when your child follows the instruction!
- ⑤ Pick your battles – in this stressful time, it may not be beneficial to add to the stress in your household by requiring your child to do ALL the challenging tasks of daily living completely on his own.
 - If your child can typically do the task on his own, follow through and require him to do so to help maintain skills.
 - If your child typically needs help with the task, go ahead and help him out!
 - Try to avoid telling your child to do a task and then changing your mind if he shows frustration; this will cause bigger problems in the long run!
- ⑥ Remember: problematic, dangerous, or inappropriate behavior is a form of communication. What is your child trying to tell you with those behaviors? Try to consider the context to figure that out, and give your child a more appropriate way to send you that message. As a preventative strategy, you could schedule these things into your day so your child never gets to the point where he tries to send the message in an inappropriate way!
 - Messages your child may be sending you with problematic behavior:
 - I'm tired.
 - I'm hungry.
 - I want to be left alone for a while.
 - I want to play with you for a while.
 - I need more activity; I've been cooped up in the house.
 - I need some down time; all these changes are making me tired.





Schedules During COVID-19:

Let's Not Forget About Adolescents and Adults



During this time of social distancing, the importance of a routine and a schedule should not be forgotten with adolescents and adults on the autism spectrum. Making a schedule will provide structure, increase independence, expand interests, and make the transition back to “normal” days a little bit easier.

Here are sample activities to include in a schedule:

Wellness and Relaxation:

- Write in a journal
- Meditate
- Yoga
- Telehealth- mental health visits
- Puzzles
- Coloring

Movement:

- Go for a run
- Jump rope
- Stream a workout class
- Take your dog for a walk
- Go for a hike

Fun:

- Stream virtual tours of museums, zoos, national parks
- Look through old photos
- Facetime a friend and start watching a movie at the same time
- Listen to music
- Start a new tv show
- Dance!
- Read a book
- Play a video game

Household Chores:

- Organize a space
- Laundry
- Purge unwanted items
- Yardwork
- Daily cleaning
- Cooking

Personal Tasks:

- Prepare your taxes
- Pay bills
- Redo your budget
- Take an online course
- Make resume changes

Connect with others:

- Call or text
- Video calls
- Virtual game night
- Share videos
- Write a letter

cont.





Quick tips for building a schedule:

- Start with what has to be done (sleep, eat, shower).
- Break up the day with preferred and non preferred tasks.
- Try to include the following throughout the day:
 - Fun Activity
 - Household Chore
 - Connecting with Others
 - Mental Health Activities
 - Movement Activities
 - Relaxation time
- Schedules are flexible, move or change activities as needed.

Sample Schedule:

Time	Task
8:00	Wake Up
8:00-9:00	Cook and Eat Breakfast
9:00-9:45	Get Ready For The Day
9:45-10:15	HeadSpace App/Yoga
10:15-11:00	Household Chores: Laundry/Vaccum
11:00-11:30	Video Call Family
11:30-12:30	Play Video Games
12:30-1:30	Lunch and Clean Kitchen
1:30-3:00	Go to a Park
3:00-4:00	Personal Growth: Online Class
4:00-5:00	Look through Old Pictures
5:00-7:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make Dinner • Video Call Family to Have a Virtual • Clean Up
7:00-10:00	Relaxation Time!
10:00-11:00	Read/Listen to Music
11:00	Bed Time

cont.





Watch TV with your loved ones. Yes, we said watch tv!

Five Reasons to Watch TV

- ① It builds common language and knowledge. Language learned can foster imaginative play and conversation.
- ② You need the break! Being present and supportive at all times isn't possible.
- ③ TV can foster a family bond and a shared interest of which everyone can be a part.
- ④ It offers a time to cuddle and relax with no other obligations.
- ⑤ It can serve as a form of video modeling. Characters on television can model different skills, emotions, and ideas.

Remember To:

- Structure TV time
- Establish time limits
- Carefully pick what is watched!
- Choose age and/or developmentally appropriate content
- Use parental controls
- Preview new shows and movies
- Periodically ask questions to check-in





Grocery Delivery/Pickup Services:

Shipt: [Your Local Stores Delivered - Shipt Same-Day Delivery](#)

Instacart: [Groceries Delivered From Local Stores](#)

[Walmart Grocery](#)

Kroger: [Online Grocery Delivery - Delivery in One Hour](#)

Kroger: [Online Grocery Pickup - Order Online for Pickup \(Formerly ClickList\)](#)

Prescription Delivery Services:

CVS: [Prescription Delivery](#)

Walgreens: [Prescription Delivery](#)

Amazon: [PillPack by Amazon Pharmacy](#)

Mental Health:

Webinar - Anxiety, Autism: Five Prime Suspects- with tips for coping at home during Coronavirus Outbreak: <https://www.autism.org/anxiety-five-suspects/>

[Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19 | CDC](#)

[Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)

[Mental Health & Respite](#)

[Headspace: Meditation and Sleep Made Simple](#)

Let's Have Fun!

Draw a Picture: [LUNCH DOODLES with Mo Willems!](#)

Get Moving: [GoNoodle: Home](#)

Sensory Play: [30 DIY Sensory Toys and Games to Stimulate Your Child's Creative Growth](#)

Ride Disney Rides from Home: [Virtual Disney World](#)

Listen to Famous Person Read Children's Stories: [Storyline Online](#)



We Want To Hear From You!

Please take the time to fill out this brief survey

